

Interview with Charlotte Loris

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Information Series

CHARLOTTE LORIS

Interviewed by: Max Kraus

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Bio-Sketch

Q: —oral history interview with Charlotte Loris recorded in Arlington on June 8, 1989. The interviewer is Max Kraus and this is tape number 1.

Charlotte, you did not start your career with USIA but with the State Department, is that correct?

LORIS: Well, if you want to take it from there. Actually to start out with, I graduated from high school; the war came along; I went to California then I went to Hawaii where I worked for four years in an engineering firm. And then I thought, well, I want to see the world and I wanted to travel but I didn't have enough money to pay my way. So I thought, I better get a job that pays me. So I went to California—quit my good job in Hawaii—went to California, signed up with the State Department. USIA was then a part of State.

Entrance Into USIE Area of State Department—Saigon, 1950

Q: We are talking about what year now?

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LORIS: This is the end of 1949, beginning of 1950. So I went back to Washington and got socked into the red tape, getting ready to go overseas and they said it would take months and months to have a security clearance, all of this. But actually three months later I left on an Air France plane for Paris and Saigon, which was located in what was then French Indochina. I was to replace a girl who had been murdered, an American girl.

Q: Had been murdered? In Saigon?

LORIS: She and a friend were entertaining and they were having a party and they went out to pick somebody up. They never solved it. They apparently were ambushed in their jeep.

Anyway, I arrived in Saigon—.

Q: Just a minute. Before you arrived in Saigon, didn't that give you some pause about taking the kind of job that you—.

LORIS: No, I wanted adventure.

Q: All right. So you arrived in Saigon when?

LORIS: Let me backtrack just a brief bit.

Q: Okay.

LORIS: I was assigned to Saigon. In those days you had a choice; I could have gone to Munich or to Rio or Saigon. Having always wanted to go to the Orient, to China, I picked Saigon. And they grabbed me with their arms, ahah, we have one. So I went through the preparation and then went over to get my medical shots for old Saigon, which was still a French colony. While sitting in the Naval Department barracks waiting to get my shots, they asked me where I was going and I said Saigon. Well, this man came up to me and said, "Did I hear you say you were going to Saigon?" I said, "Yes." And this man said,

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“Well, I'm going to be the new American consul in Hanoi.” Well, in those days, American consul, what's that? Hanoi? Where's that?

So we chatted a bit. I was going out to Saigon as a clerk, class FSS-13, I think it was, that paid \$2,850 a year. But all your transportation was paid. So this very kindly gentleman, who sort of walked like a penguin, gave me his name, which was Wendell Blanke. He asked me when I was leaving and I said I was going up to New York for a few days and then to Paris where I would be spending three days and then I was booked for a flight from Paris to Saigon. He said, “I will meet you at the airport in Paris and buy you a drink.” I thought, this is great, what a way to go. So I had an exciting trip from New York to Paris but I won't go into detail on it.

The “Routine” Flight From Paris to Saigon

On the day I came to leave Paris I went to the airport and was checked in. I sat down at a bench, because it wasn't a fancy airport in those days, and this man sort of walked up to me, waddling like a penguin, sat down beside me. No cocktail lounge. He pulls out a flask and we have a drink of brandy from the flask, which I had never had before.

Q: So he did make good on the offer of a drink in Paris.

LORIS: Yes, he bought me a drink out of his flask.

Q: And that was Wendell Blanke.

LORIS: It was Wendell Blanke. Then we get on this little DC-3 plane—we didn't have jets in those days—and we flew across France and into Tunis, Morocco, Algiers. The plane, except for Wendell and myself, was loaded with French Foreign Legionnaires going to French Indochina to help the French.

So we're on this plane and we're leaving Tunis and I said, Wendell—he's sitting next to me—there's something wrong with this plane. And about that time the pilot announces, we've

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lost an engine. It's a two-engine plane. So we went back to Tunis and stayed a few days. They flew down a new engine from Paris. We took off again and went via North Africa to Cairo, one of the stops. Cairo was an all-day stop and it was Easter Sunday. It was hot, sticky, with no air conditioning. I had with me an Agatha Christie mystery book, which I read three times in the airport, and drank hot citronade with flies sitting on the rim of the glass. We finally—

Q: What?

LORIS: Flies.

Q: No, what did you drink?

LORIS: Citronade. Without gin or vodka, just plain citronade. Sticky stuff. And flies swarming around. Finally we take off and we go via Burma and what have you. We finally get to Saigon and it was three days later, four. But remember, this was a DC-3.

Q: All the way on a DC-3 from Paris to Saigon.

LORIS: Greatest plane ever made.

Q: I know.

LORIS: They're still flying.

Q: I know.

Saigon Arrival—April, 1950

LORIS: So we finally arrived in Saigon in the morning and it's hot and sticky. We get off the plane and this young man comes out and he says, "are you Charlotte Loris." And I said, "yes." He said, "well, I'm here to meet you." I said, "oh, well, there's another gentleman with me." He said, "Who?" I said, "Wendell Blanke." He said, "Oh, my God, the new consul

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for Hanoi.” And nobody was there to meet him. But we pile in the jeep together and go into Saigon to this funny little consulate general. Sticky and hot. But that's the way Wendell and I arrived in town.

Then I was taken up—I dropped my bags off, they took me into the consulate general and Ed Gullion was the charg# d'affaires.

Q: And that was approximately what date?

LORIS: About April 2nd, 1950.

Q: 1950. Let me just stop here and—[blank in tape]

So you are in Saigon—.

LORIS: And I'm at the consulate general. We go up these little stairs and we arrive in this small office and go into this bigger office where Ed Gullion was charg#. And there sits my friend, Wendell Blanke. So Ed Gullion says, “Oh, Wendell, I would like you to meet our new clerk-typist, Charlotte.” He said, “Meet her? I've slept with her on a plane for three nights.” Great hilarity. Anyway, Wendell and Ed and I were friends from then on.

Sudden Assignment to Take Notes of Major Meeting of French High Military Commission

Then I was in Saigon, oh, about two weeks, assigned to the information division where the peripatetic Francis Cunningham was the PAO, a State Department man. There weren't many people in Saigon and I think I was the only female that knew shorthand. So I'm sitting at my desk about two weeks after I'm there and a car comes and they said, “are you ready to go, Miss Loris?” I said, “Go where?” “Oh, you're taking the minutes of the meeting.” “What meeting?” So I grabbed a couple of shorthand notebooks and a bunch of pencils. Now remember, our offices were not air conditioned and it was sticky hot. So Francis Cunningham says, “Charlotte, you have been elected to take the notes of this meeting.” So he takes me downstairs and bundles me into this small car which we had in

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those days. And it's a meeting of the French High Militaire and the Commandant and the High Commissioner, an American military group and high Vietnamese officials to discuss the French Indochina War.

I arrived and was swept through the palace gates by the gendarmes, Mademoiselle Loris? Yes. On I went, up and pattered down this marble hallway in my sandals, which were clipping-clapping, and my legs were running sweat. They escort me down to big double doors, I open the doors, and there sit 40 men.

Q: Palace?

LORIS:: This was the High Commissioner's Palace.

Q: French High Commissioner's Palace in Saigon?

LORIS: In Saigon. And I collapse in a chair at the door, realizing the meeting is now in session, I got out my notebook and started taking notes. Then there was a break shortly after I arrived, and Ed Gullion came over and escorted me to the center of this big table where all of the interpreters, the maps and everything else were, and for one solid week—five days—all I did all day was take notes. There were many strange names of the battlefields in northern Indochina which of course I did not know. But Gullion was very kind. I would put a number down and he would write the name down and put the number so that when I transcribed the notes later I was able to fit the whole thing together.

Q: Who were the other participants in this meeting?

LORIS: The French High Commissioner, high French military command, and I can't remember all the names, and high American military, generals, and the highest Vietnamese in those days. There were about 40 people in all. We did not in those days have tape recorders or computers or anything like that, and I was the only person who was taking the notes.

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Q: Only person among all of these—? Nobody else?

LORIS: Nobody else. And they used to wrap me up in an armored vehicle, take me back to the Consulate, shut me up in a room where I'd type up these notes which later became history.

Q: I bet.

LORIS: I felt like Mata Hari.

Exciting—and Hazardous—Adventure in Saigon

Anyway, life proceeded. A few weeks later I walked down the street to my office, went around the corner, and a machine gun gunned down the head of the French Surete right in front of me. I jumped in a doorway to avoid the bullets, and survived.

After that, because the French did not have many people, the Korean War had started, and communiques were coming in from Korea and Hanoi, again I was selected to go. The French did not have anybody and neither did the Vietnamese. I used to get up at 4:30 in the morning, ride a cyclo downtown to the French Chamber of Commerce and type on a French typewriter, which I had never seen before, in French, the communiques. Then I would leave there about 10:00—

Q: The communiques about the war?

LORIS: About the war in Hanoi and the Korean war.

Q: And the Korean war?

LORIS: It had started. Then I went back to my office about 10:00 and worked all day there. It was a very exciting time.

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Q: What were these communiques for? Were they for—

LORIS: For the French, for the government, the French, and released to the press.

Anyway, it was a very exciting two years in Saigon and many adventures. I'm not going to tell you all of them. Too bad. You would love it.

Q: Well, I think that I know some of the ones that you want to leave off the record.

LORIS: Right.

Opium Den Interlude, Courtesy Graham Greene

Q: However, if I'm not mistaken, and I hope you will put this on the record, I think you told me once that while you were in Saigon you got acquainted with Graham Greene and he took you to an opium den.

LORIS: Oh, very much so. I met Graham Greene at a cocktail party where, you know, there were many cocktail parties. He is a great reprobate and loves to have somebody listen to him. Well, I like to talk, but I also like to listen. So we got together a number of times and one evening we were discussing the ethnic background of Chinese and Asians and I said, I've always wanted to go to an opium den. He said, let's go tonight, after dinner. I said fine. So we go down after this cocktail party and we have dinner in a restaurant. Then he said, we won't drive, we'll just take a bicycle chair which is called a cyclo. So we get in the cyclo and the guy pedals us out to this opium den. Graham Greene was an habitue of opium dens and he knew Asia.

So we get out in this dimly lit place and go in. Mamasan, or madame, didn't want me to come in because she recognized that I was American. So we sat in this little overheated room with stuffed settees, drank brandy and soda with no ice, and she wouldn't let us into the big room where the habitues go. But we went into a private room.

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It was just like I expected it to be. Absolutely fascinating. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I did want Graham Greene to buy me the silver opium pipe but he didn't. So he smoked nine pipes and I smoked three. But I didn't inhale because I was scared shitless. But it was fun.

Q: Since you are retired, they will not—

LORIS: Fire me.

Q: —start a security investigation for drug abuse.

LORIS: Why not find out what the people do? I can understand. As Graham Greene, when we used to talk, he said try to understand these people that live in these overpopulated, crowded areas of the world, half of them sleep at day, half at night, there's not enough room for them all to sleep at night, so smoke opium or whatever. Go out n cloud nine.

Q: Graham Greene wrote a novel about Saigon called, if I'm not mistaken, The Quiet American.

LORIS: There are several composite characters in there, all of which I recognized. It was a good book. Read it.

Q: Including—is one of the composite characters at least in part Charlotte Loris?

LORIS: Yes.

Q: I'll have to read it.

LORIS: Then I left Saigon after many exciting adventures. I wish I would recount them all, they are in my mind.

Q: We are now talking about what year?

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LORIS: I left in 1952. And I went to—but first I made several trips. I went to Bangkok as a side trip. I wanted to meet the writer of the Bangkok Editor, which is one of the things that convinced me to go to that area of the world. He had been a former member of the OSS and a friend of Jim Thompson's. I did meet him and his Thai mistress, and a few other interesting people, for a glorious weekend.

Anyhow, I was finally taken out of Saigon and assigned—.

Q: Jim Thompson, was he already at that time into Thai silk?

LORIS: Oh, yes, but he just had a very small shop which was about as big as a three-cornered closet. It was fabulous. It was nothing like it is now. He had not done "The King and I" or any of those costumes. But he was a very interesting person. I met a lot of interesting people. In spite of the fact that I was an FSS-13. I did play a lot of tennis and met people that way. Some interesting stories about that but I won't go into it because I had the right to play on the Palace courts and a few other places.

Japan, 1952

Then I was assigned to Japan. I went home via Europe, had my home leave, went to Japan, which was also interesting but not the excitement of Saigon. Everyone will always remember their first post. I had a great time in Japan. There I did have the great fortune to have—I was in the Kobe, the branch post, as secretary, coming up the ladder. And there was a great man in Tokyo who was Executive Officer, by the name of Lew Schmidt, whom I think was one of the first men to recognize that females had ability. And I think it's thanks to Lew Schmidt that I moved on up the ladder to become Executive Officer myself.

Q: Lew was—

LORIS: He was Executive Officer in Tokyo.

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Q: Executive Officer of USIS?

LORIS: Yes.

Q: At the branch post.

LORIS: No, in Tokyo. For the total Japan Program. And while I was in Japan USIA became an independent agency, separate from State, in '53. Anyway, I had some interesting field trips, met lots of interesting people, got to know and like the Japanese. Absolutely different type of place than Saigon. I, as in Saigon, taught English and got to know a lot of Japanese there, taught English to the provincial foreign ministry in Kobe Japan. All this is extracurricular activity which one could do in those days to develop their future potential.

After Japan, Libya. 1954

Then I left Japan and was assigned to Libya, North Africa. I spent five years there, and I loved it.

Q: Did you go back to Libya on a DC-3?

LORIS: No, I flew—no, but I flew to Libya, stopped in Rome to visit some friends. Maybe it was a DC-3. In those days there were only two flights a week from Rome to Tripoli. This was before the discovery of Libyan oil. So I stopped to visit my friends and they took me to the airport. We had had lunch and, of course, good Italian wine. We got to the airport half an hour before the plane left, but Customs had already closed the gate and they wouldn't let me on, because they were taking their siesta after their luncheon wine. I said, well, what do you do? Go back. So I went back to my friends and we sent a telegram to Tripoli stating that I would not be on the plane that was due to arrive.

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In the meantime, the man I was to work for in Tripoli, John Hamilton, who is now deceased, had gone to the airport to meet me. Of course I was not on the plane and it was one of those days in the Spring, April, again, where there was a hot jebli wind blowing which can be horrible. But here is this female you didn't want—a female in the Arab world—and she was not on the plane. He goes back to the Embassy and there's a telegram stating I would be on a plane three days later. I had to go by Malta to get to Tripoli.

I finally get to Tripoli and this man again meets me. He's not too happy about a female but he didn't know me, yet. So we're going into town and he said, I thought I'd take you home for lunch. I said, I'm dying for a good martini. Well, his ears perked up at that because he loved martinis, and we were the greatest of friends ever since. And I'm still friends—his wife lives in Santa Barbara. He's now deceased, but we get together and laugh over the old times in Libya, which became a very fun place for a single female because along with your work—which was serious and I worked hard and did budgets and ran the library and exhibits and did everything else that secretaries were crawling out from under doing—there were all these geologists and paleontologists, all these marvelous men to go out with. It was fabulous.

I spent five years there. I also handled the cultural affairs program. So, I was beginning to move up the ladder.

Q: You must have been at that time already—when you were in Japan. In Kobe, you must have been one of the relatively few women in USIA Foreign Service.

LORIS: I think there were four or five of us. There were Tina Mayland and Joan Crowley, who later married Jim McGinley. There were four of us. [Editor's Note: There were actually seven besides Louis, including in addition to those named Joan Gibbons, Nancy Downing, Marge Smith, and one other] That was because of Lew Schmidt, because we were all in Japan. Lew Schmidt I think gave us the impetus to take on additional activities and prove our ability. And he recognized our ability.

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Q: Because technically you were all secretaries.

LORIS: We were all actually what you call clerk-typists.

Q: Clerk—. I thought you had advanced to a secretary already in Saigon.

LORIS: No, no. Still called clerk-typist. I just kept getting promoted so I went from a 13 to a 5. I got promoted every year, plus a double. My friends used to say, every year the promotion list comes out and your name is on it. And it was. It was true.

So, anyway, I had five great years in North Africa. I loved the climate there. Then I was assigned to India.

Q: Before we go to India, in Tripoli, was—did you run into any kind of discrimination on the part of the Libyans because you were a woman and Libya is a Muslim country?

LORIS: Negative. Because I think at that time women were beginning to feel this new move to come out from under purdah. I used to work with a group of Libyan women, through their schools. I was allowed to have them at my home, with the approval of the Minister of Education, which I did. And I got to know some of the Libyan police officials, Secret Service types, and Interpol, got to know them quite well, and I had great entree with them. I went to quite a number of meals with Libyan friends and I was allowed to communicate with the wives in the backroom, although they did not eat with us, but I did. At that time there was the beginning of a break through, the emerging of the Libyan woman from purdah.

Q: Was that at the time when Idris was king?

LORIS: Idris was king. Qadhafi was nowhere near. But I like Libya, I love the climate. Too bad—I was there when they first discovered oil, got to know quite a bit about that, did a big

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exhibit for the first bottle of oil out of the sand of Libya. And I made some marvelous desert trips with paleontologists and geologists into the desert, absolutely fascinating.

1959: Assignment to India Aborted; To WashingtonAs Program Advisor, Managing Foreign Visitors to U.S.

Q: So from Libya you went to India.

LORIS: No, I did not go to India. I had already—by this time—

Q: I thought you said—

LORIS: I was assigned to India. I had been assigned two years before but the ambassador in Libya sent a telegram saying he had to have me back in Libya, because my breakthrough in work with the women and the Interpol was very important. He explained it to them. Which I was flattered by, of course.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

LORIS: Tappin, John Tappin. A political appointee. Anyway, after—at the end of almost five years I was again assigned to India, to New Delhi, as an assistant cultural affairs officer.

Q: And we are now talking about which year?

LORIS: 1959. I was to be assistant cultural affairs officer in student affairs in New Delhi. I'm about as far removed from cultural affairs as anybody could be. I had no college education, no degrees. I must admit I'm rather smart and I could work with young people and taught English. But I didn't feel cultural affairs was my field. And besides I had been overseas 10 years and I wanted an assignment in the United States. I went back and I said, look, I've been overseas 10 years; you say that it's a must. After 10 years, why can't

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I be in the United States? Bill Handley was then the Area Director and he agreed. He said, "Charlotte—

Q: Who was it? Bill?

LORIS: Bill Handley. I was assigned to work as the program advisor on handling the foreign visitors of USIA and local employees who came to the United States.

Followed by (1963) Assignment to (Then)Belgian Congo

I had four glorious years in Washington, at the end of which I was given one of those rapid courses in French and assigned to the Belgian Congo as Executive Officer. I am now an FSS-5. I go to the Congo and I become an FSR-4.

Q: And that was what year?

LORIS: That was 1963. And the Congo—

Q: '63.

LORIS: '63. The Congo is again one of my favorite posts. Marvelous group of people there, great esprit de corps. And of course I had the good fortune to meet Max Kraus.

Q: It was the good fortune of Max Kraus to have met Charlotte Loris because as I wrote in my book, and this is perfectly true, I and none of the USIS officers assigned to the Congo at that time would have survived without Charlotte Loris.

Arrival in Leopoldville

LORIS: I think it was part of the job to welcome people. When I first arrived there, the local employee, who was a great man, Phil Mahein, met me at the airport. It was 4:00 in the morning. So he took me into town to this kookie hotel, not the big one, which was sort of closed, and I was to go to this man's house for breakfast at 10:00. Now it's 4:00, 4:30,

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5:00 in the morning. And I thought, oh. So I go into this funny little room and dump my bag and I walk across the street to this other hotel which had a dining room. And I thought, well, maybe I can have a cup of coffee. Now it's about 5:30 a.m. and dawn, daylight. They don't have any coffee, it's not time yet. I said, what can I have? I had my choice between orange soda pop—which I absolutely abhor—or a beer. And I thought, well, I'm hungry and I'm thirsty. And I'm sitting here by myself. So I thought, well, I'll have a beer. I never had a beer at that hour in the morning before. It was worse than having brandy at the airport with Wendell Blanke. So I ordered a beer. And I don't get a little beer, they bring out one of these great big Congolese beers in a quart jug.

Q: Premi's?

LORIS: Premi's, yes.

Q: I mean, it was the standard breakfast drink.

LORIS: He uncapped it and I drank it, and I drank it all. That was my introduction. I decided after that, anybody that came in I would meet.

Q: I don't whether it was the orange pop, I don't know whether it was the one that they gave you the choice of, but there was one that was quite popular in the eastern Congo, especially Bukavu, called Spit.

LORIS: Oh, yes, but we didn't have it. This was just plain old, crappy old orange soda pop.

Q: The Premi's was better.

LORIS: The Premi's was better. But I had many adventures in the Congo, none of which I'm going to tell you. Max has said some in his book, but some of them were great stories. I had four years there. At first I had been reassigned but I made the mistake when I went home. I got malaria and I didn't tell USIA or the State Department. I just went home to California and recovered. Then I came back at the end of home leave and the travel

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section was checking my leave record. I said, oh, put me down for sick leave, I had malaria. They said, what? You can't go to the Congo. Oh, God. I said, listen, I'm leaving tomorrow. And I really was.

Well—

Q: You mean you were supposed to round trip after—.

LORIS: The State Department and USIA did not know that I had had malaria in California, which was—

Q: But you had been on home leave and you were supposed to go back to the—

LORIS: The Congo. I had been reassigned. And I loved it and I wanted to go back. So anyway, USIA and everybody else in the State Department, doctors, everybody was on the phone. I felt very important. And they said, well, I could go back but if anything happened they said, "Charlotte, if you go back there and you have any recurrence you send a telegram and we'll pull you out immediately." I did have the bad type of malaria, but being strong, I recovered.

So I went back to the Congo and I wanted to stay longer, but after almost another two years they put me on a direct transfer to Korea because they felt I should be in a cold climate.

Q: That was when you left the Congo, was it in '65, '66?

LORIS: The end of '66, beginning of '67. I arrived in Seoul—

Q: I know you were still in the Congo in June 1966. I remember that very—

LORIS: It was January '67 when I left the Congo and went to Korea.

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Q: Yes, because I know that in 1966 I was in Washington and ran the French broadcast to Africa for VOA and I came on a trip to the Congo to Leopoldville and I was at a party in your apartment with Rudy Aggrey, who was there, on the day when Leopoldville officially became Kinshasa, on June 30, 1966.

LORIS: I left in January '67. While in the Congo—I will backtrack a minute—I was fortunate enough as Executive Officer to travel around a great deal and get to Bukavu, Kisangani and to Luluabourg and Coquilhatville. Also to Brazzaville and down to Luanda, marvelous adventures. But it was hard work and I loved it. We had a great PAO. First we had Steve Baldanza and then the famous John Mowinckel arrived and Rudy Aggrey came as deputy PAO, and Jake Gillespie and other people were there. It was really a marvelous crew.

Q: We had a marvelous—

LORIS: Great esprit.

Q: First of all, we had a great ambassador in Mac Godley.

LORIS: Right, Mac Godley.

Q: And then John Mowinckel was there. Then we had Jake Gillespie. We had McKinney Russell.

LORIS: Right. We even had Martin Ackerman for a while before Rudy.

Q: Ackerman for a while. Mert Bland was there.

Bob Franklin, who at first was in Coquilhatville, then in Bukavu. We had a good USIS crew there.

LORIS: Yes, very good. It was good. And Barry Ballou—I met him at 4:00 in the morning at the airport.

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Q: *You met most of us at 4:00 in the morning.*

LORIS: Barry went down to Luluabourg and later was replaced by Pete Synodis, who was later replaced by Mert Bland.

Q: Yes.

LORIS: And I was there through all of them. Anyway, I love the Congo, I think it's an exciting country. I think that Sub-saharan Africa is a pulsating place and I still keep up on it and read about it.

Cold Climate Prescribed by Headquarters—Seoul, Korea 1967

I had to leave, they said. I must go to a cold country. So I took off for Korea. Well, I was there about a year and a half and there was a big cutback. I didn't think that I was busy enough, my Korean assistant was very capable of handling routine executive jobs and there was a Deputy PAO. It was a big staff. But not nearly the amount of work required that we had in the Congo or French Indochina, a place like that. So I said to the PAO, I said, why don't you eliminate my job, I don't think it's necessary.

Q: *What was your job?*

LORIS: Executive Officer in Korea.

Q: *Executive Officer in Korea. Who was the PAO?*

LORIS: Ken Bunce.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

1968: At Loris' Suggestion, Her Job (Executive Officer) Combined With Deputy PAO Job; Loris to Indonesia

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LORIS: Well, then, they eliminated the Executive Officer job and kept the Deputy PAO who had to take over the Executive Officer's job, but I won't mention his name as he was not very happy about it. So then, because I was supposed to be in a cold country for seven years, they immediately transferred me on a direct transfer to Indonesia, a land of malaria —

Q: That's a nice cold country.

LORIS: —humidity and heat, where I was Executive Officer for four years. And I had a good time.

Q: For four years. That was from—

LORIS: '68 to '72. I came back to Washington. I wanted to come back to Washington, I asked for it, because it was again 10 years.

Q: Let's not go so fast. Tell me some of your stories about Indonesia. I know that you can put some of them on the record.

LORIS: They're not really as exciting as the Congo was.

Q: I know, but I mean—I know that you have for a long time have always been a space nut
—

LORIS: Oh, absolutely.

Q: And I think that you had several visits from astronauts in Djakarta.

LORIS: Oh, yes. Pete Conrad was in the first group to arrive. And that was fine. Interesting thing about their visit. First, I had asked for astronauts and the Embassy didn't think we should have them. I did, but I couldn't do anything. Anyway, we finally got the word they were coming and of course the Embassy wanted to take charge but I was made program

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officer, project officer. So the Marine Gunny came to me and said, "Char, we have a young Marine here who's to be decorated for Vietnam. Do you think that Pete Conrad—who was also a Marine—would present the decoration?" I said, "I'll send him a telegram." I think the astronauts were in Burma at the time. So I sent a telegram, which the PAO signed. Well, I didn't clear it with the Naval Attach#. So they get the read file.

Q: Who was the PAO at that time?

LORIS: I think it was Jack Getchell. I'm not sure whether it was Jack Getchell or Marshall Brement at that point. Anyway, they get the read file the next morning and it was like, who is this person who sent this telegram, how could she dare send it without clearing it with us? Well, in the meantime, an answer comes back from Pete Conrad, signed Pete Conrad, "Delighted. Arrange." I didn't get demoted for this little misdemeanor. We had the ceremony and I had a great time with the astronauts. We filmed the presentation and invited the Naval Attach# and the Marine colonel and everybody else. But it was strictly a show. The poor little Marine didn't know. We had to have Marine guards on duty with the astronauts and we put him on duty in civilian clothes. And he walks in and he's presented by the astronaut.

That was our first astronaut visit. Then we had another one, unofficial, where Wally Schirra was coming through with the then IMV (Motion Picture and TV Office) director, Stevens, George Stevens. Too bad I didn't tell you the story about George Stevens in the Congo, that would crack you up.

Q: I think you ought to backtrack and tell the story of George Stevens in the Congo because I was there at that time, too.

LORIS: Okay. Wally Schirra and George Stevens and a couple of guys are arriving on a hunting trip. The boondocks of Indonesia are known for tiger hunting. They are arriving at 11:00 at night on a flight from Bombay, a hell of a long distance away. The PAO, they had this all planned. The Indonesian officials were going to meet them and they were going to

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go right off to this hunting lodge. I said, look, you arrive—and I was in charge of customs clearance, and I got their guns through clearance, too, through customs. oh, we have to get right in these cars and go off to this place because we have to be ready to go hunting at like 5:00 in the morning. I said, look, I'm going to tell you one thing. You get off a plane from a long trip, you're going to want a little rest stop. "Oh, no, we don't have time for that." I said, look—. So I had several arguments over three days and I said, "All right, I'm going to tell you men something." And we were at a meeting. I said, "I've been on long flights more than any of you, let's face it. You get off a plane, it's been a long trip and you just want to go somewhere and sit and fart." Well, they sort of gasped and they said, Charlotte. I said, it's absolutely true. I said, just please make arrangements— and you can stop by my place, it's on the way.

Okay, they agreed that if they had to they would stop at my place. So about midnight these cars pull up and in they come. I had gin and tonics ready, or anything else they wanted, and they come in and sit down and Wally Schirra goes in the bathroom. And he's in there for almost an hour. And when he finally left—he came out and he thanked me and kissed me and said, "Charlotte, you don't know what this means." I said, "Yes, I do know what it means." And he drank his gin and tonic and they finally got off and got away. But when they left Indonesia, it was about four or five days later, he just grabbed me and he said, "Thanks again, Charlotte, you understand."

Anyway, I had a lot of fun on the space program. I really took care of a lot of it and became quite a space expert. I even had the moon rock in my little Volkswagen, with police escort, to take it back to the Embassy communications safe.

Q: I'm a veteran moon rock babysitter, myself.

LORIS: I know, it's in your book.

Short Flashback to George Stevens' Visit to Congo

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Q: But let's backtrack for a minute and go back to the Congo and let's put it on the record, because it can be put on the record, the George Stevens visit to Leopoldville.

LORIS: George Stevens was director of IMV. And he wanted to see an outdoor movie. Doug Smith was then the films officer. Well, outdoor film, he's got to be kidding. But we'll arrange something. So we planned a show, a film we had made on village politics in the Congo. We would show it out in this village. We would sit on wooden benches and the village chieftain agreed to have beer and the famous orange soda pop on hand. Well, George arrives and he's all excited about this outdoor movie. We get in these dumb old mobile units we had, all of which were breaking down—we'd been writing and writing and writing to get new ones. So we pile into these things, three vehicles, and we head out to this village which was about 40 miles out of town or something like that. Well the jeeps break down, the mobiles break down. There we are, sweating in the evening heat, early evening, and our local film technician gets over to the village and gets some help to come.

We finally get to this village about 10:00 at night. By then they've drunk up all the beer and those mosquitoes were all over the place. Everybody was just dusty and dirty and sweaty. George Stevens was in a bush jacket, and I think I was in a jumpsuit. Anyway, we finally leave the village, it's around midnight. We're hungry, we haven't eaten, we've had nothing except this dumb old orange pop because the beer was all gone. So we all go back to my apartment. We get back to my apartment, and have scrambled eggs and beer.

George Stevens kept saying, "Charlotte, I want to do something that Dan Oleksiw didn't do." He knew about the famous visit of Dan Oleksiw, whom I also treated royally. So I says, "Dougie, we've got to do something different." Dougie says, okay—just the three of us now are left and it's getting like 2:00 in the morning. So we go out to the Cite, which is where all the African nightlife goes on. This is not part of what was in Leopoldville. So we get in the car, Dougie's Volkswagen, and we go out to the Cite to this nightclub. It was jammed with Congolese dancing and whooping it up and drinking beer to canned music. We go in and, we are white, compared to them, and I saw some Congolese friends so I

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—Dougie says, I'll go park the car and I'll be back. I started talking to these people and I said, "Now, George, don't go anywhere." Well, I'm talking to my Congolese friends and George—all of a sudden he's gone. Dougie comes back waving his arms and he says, "Where's George?" I said, "I haven't a clue." He said, "We've got to go find him." So we go searching around. We finally find him. He finally found the car and was standing down by the car. We said, "What the hell are you doing down here?" He said, "They thought I was a mercenary and I got scared." So he got in the car and we took him home.

I had had some good letters from him after he got back to Washington. He did have his dusty old bush jacket hanging in his office for a long time after his visit.

Q: I know why George wanted to do something in Leo that Dan hadn't done, because when he arrived, I mean the previous visit had been to Lagos. And at one of the parties in your apartment I asked, "George, what did you do in Lagos?" And he said, "I was a prisoner o."

1972: Washington As Traveling Regional Executive Officer

LORIS: Well, then, anyway. Then I left Indonesia— that's going back to where we were, and went back to Washington and got the assignment I wanted because I was putting my niece through Georgetown and she's like a daughter to me. This is where I am now is at her place in Arlington. My first assignment was traveling all over Africa cleaning out old files and trying to train people and balance budgets and, you know, just Regional Executive Officer work. It was fun. I enjoyed it because I got to every African country but one. I loved Mali. You can have Chad, you can give it back the French Foreign Legion. Even Ouagadougou wasn't bad.

Retirement in 1975

Then after that I became Executive Officer for ICS and at the end of that I was 59 and I thought, I'm going to retire, they're not going to tell me to get out at 60. So I retired at 59,

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moved to Santa Barbara, come back to Washington twice a year, love it all. I get lots of visitors. Come see me anytime.

Recollections of Past Incidents in Far Away Places

Q: I remember when you were still on this Regional African Executive Officer job.

LORIS: Oh, yeah. Came to Geneva.

A. She Comes to Geneva

Q: You came to Geneva once. I got a telegram from you saying that you were coming to Geneva and meet your niece Heidi there to go skiing.

LORIS: Right.

Q: And gave me your flight number and everything else. And I cabled back and said, I'll meet you at the airport. Except that between the time that I sent that telegram and the time that you arrived, I got word that Henry Kissinger was coming on one of his periodic visits to Geneva and I sent an immediate telegram to Ouagadougou, I think—

LORIS: No, it was Bujumbura.

Q: No, no, it wasn't Bujumbura. It wasn't West Africa.

LORIS: It was East Africa. Ouagadougou is in West Africa.

Q: I know. And you were in West Africa.

LORIS: East.

Q: When I got that—I don't know, Ouagadougou or—

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LORIS: Chad.

Q: You know. One of the not terribly advanced posts, let's say.

LORIS: More lik.

Q: And you never got the telegram because—

LORIS: That's right. I'm pretty sure it was Chad.

Q: —if an immediate telegram arrives after working hours they give it to a little barefoot boy in a forked stick to deliver. So I wasn't at the airport when you arrived, but you figured out that something must have happened and the next thing I knew you were sitting in the Intercontinental watching the show going on.

LORIS: That's right. Can't lose me. Okay, I think that's enough of me. I would like to sign off.

Q: Okay. Well, I hope that if Lew is not satisfied with what we've got on the tape, I may have to come out to Santa Barbara—

LORIS: Anytime.

Q: —with the cassette recorder and get some more details from you.

LORIS: Get the rest of the wild stories.

Q: And get the rest of the wild stories. I know that—

Q: This is oral history interview with Charlotte Loris being recorded in Arlington, Virginia on June 16, 1989. This is Side 2, Tape 1; the interviewer is Max Kraus.

B. Dan Oleksiw And His Visit to Leopoldville

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Charlotte, I would like to go back to some of the incidents that we covered on the other side of the tape. One of them is a story you once told me and I would like to have that on the tape about a visit of Big Dan Oleksiw to Leopoldville. Would you mind telling that to me for the tape.

LORIS: No, I don't mind telling it to you. It was sort of an innocent visit. We got word that Big Dan was coming and—

Q: Who was Big Dan?

LORIS: He was the African Area Director. So he was only going to be there a couple of days and I planned a dinner party for him, inviting certain Embassy officials and a few Congolese. The Ambassador was planning a luncheon for him. Then the Ambassador felt that Big Dan was very important and he should have the dinner and I would have the luncheon. So the Ambassador's secretary called me and told me and I said, look, I cannot have a luncheon, I work all day. If the Ambassador will have my guests for dinner, then I'll just take Big Dan for lunch alone. So that was all agreed upon. I had Big Dan for lunch—tuna fish sandwiches and a beer. Then we went to work. We all worked hard.

Then that night, the Ambassador said, I will send my car. I said, don't bother, I'll just bring Big Dan over in my Volkswagen. So we go to the Ambassador's residence for dinner. Of course this is in the midst of one of those crises where everything is radio communications with Washington. So we go to the Ambassador's residence and he has, I think it is 14 people or something like that, or 20, with dignitaries. Very nice dinner. But Dan had told me earlier that he would like to see the Stanley monument. I said, don't worry about it, Dan, I'll get you to the Stanley monument.

So we go through dinner and there's—yes, a Drambuie would be fabulous. So then—where was I? You lot me on Drambuie. So Dan is the guest of honor so nobody can leave until he leaves. So we have dinner and there's the Ambassador had radio

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communications with Washington, telephone conversations back and forth about the crisis and the rebellion. This goes on and it finally gets about 11:00 and Big Dan is sort of nudging me, Charlotte, when are we going to the Stanley monument. I said, relax, I'll get you there. So I said, now look, Dan. Nobody can leave until you leave, so I can leave when you leave because I'm driving you. Of course, in the meantime the Ambassador again offers his limousine. I said, oh, no problem, I'll take Dan in my Volkswagen, my little bug. We finally bid our adieus to a few Congolese officials and some of the American officials, my luncheon guests, and we go out, bid fond adieus and Dan and I get in my Volkswagen. Dan said, "The Stanley monument." I said, no problem.

So we drive from the Ambassador's residence down the main boulevard—what was the name of that street, Max? The—

Q: Boulevard?

LORIS: Yeah, Boulevard. And we go down there and go out the end of it and up the hillside. I know the whole area. It's pitch dark, nothing's shining or shimmering, no stars—nothing. We get to the top of the hill, get out of my Volkswagen and I said, all right, we just go up the hillside, up the stairs, and I lead the way because I know it, I've been there before. Well, Big Dan is twice as tall as I am.

We get up there and I said, "God, it's so dark up here somebody could be standing on the other side of you and you wouldn't know it." All of a sudden I get this nudge in my ribs and this grunt, "uh-huh."

I said, "be quiet, Dan, there's somebody on the other side of me." And it was a Congolese. He had one of those saber-guns, one of those guns, you know, with a bayonet coming out the top. And he's shoving me. I said, now look. I'll pretend—he knows I'm an American but I'm not going to speak very good French, I'm going to be pretty dumb on this one. And I said, "Je suis American." Un-un. This guy keeps nudging. He doesn't speak anything

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but Kikongo, or something like that. Or Swahili. I know that he wants us to go down to the Militaire, you know, military headquarters.

I said, all right, Dan, we'll go down to the car. And this gendarme or whatever you want to call him, Congolese militaire, does not have a car, of course. He's up there guarding the Stanley monument. That's where Stanley stands up there and looks out over—. Everybody knows the story about Stanley and his search. Anyway.

Q: I don't know whether everybody knows the story about Stanley. But anyway, Stanley stands up there and he's shading his eyes from the sun with his hand. The common—as he looks out in the distance over the Stanley pool, which is the widest part of the Congo River, and the standing joke in Leopoldville is that Stanley said, I got the Congo up to here. So that is the statue which is quite a ways outside of town near the Prime Minister's residence and in a fairly sensitive area. So you take it up again from here.

LORIS: All right. So we have to bid Stanley monument adieu. I said, we have to go down and get in the car because this military guy keeps nudging me in the ribs and he's got this damned saber-gun. So we get down to the car and it's still pitch dark. Dan gets out his ID, which doesn't mean a thing. I have a diplomatic passport, which means a little bit but none of this meant anything to this guy. He just kept nudging us to get in the car. Big Dan says, "don't get in the car and drive off." I said, "don't be an ass, I'm going to die someday but not with that saber in me." We get in the car. Well, this is a little Volkswagen bug, so Big Dan gets in the back seat, and I get in the driver's seat because I have to drive the car, and the military guy, wherever he was from, Bukavu, maybe he was a Baluban, gets in beside me and he's got this long gun and saber and he puts it in between me and him, which means it goes all the way through the back. Poor Big Dan is sitting in the backseat of my little Volkswagen with a saber going right along his neck!

So I drive, and I knew where the head of the military was so we go up the hill and go in and I talk to them in French. My French was limited, but Dan's was nonexistent. So

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anyway, they explain to me that there had been a curfew called and that whole area was off limits and what was I doing up there? I said, well, I had to bring this visitor to see the Stanley monument. So they sort of escorted us back down the hill and we went home and that was the end of it.

Except, Dan said, oh, I'm so—he says—very, you know, this has been terrible. I said, well, we'll go to the Afrimagonda, the nightclub. I said, a great place to go. We used to all go there, including Larry Devlin and a few other spooky guys, the mercenaries. So we go down, I said, yeah, we'll go down and have a beer. He said, I don't drink beer. But I said, you can't drink anything else, it's the only safe thing to drink. So we go to this nightclub which really was a fabulous place, I loved it, they had fabulous music. We get down there—Dan's not a good dancer but we got up and shuffled around the floor a bit. They had these wooden tables and the place, you know, doesn't smell very good. So we order beers—beer—and we're sitting at the table and all of a sudden Dan grabs my arm and says, “Charlotte, we've got to get out of here.” I said, “What's wrong now?” Well, one of the B-girls, you know, B-girls, and the mercenaries got in a fight and this one B-girl she didn't like the advances of the mercenary so she picks up a beer bottle and cracks it across the table, goes after the guy. Dan says, we've got to get out of here, we've got to get out of here. I said, okay, Dan, let's go. So we left. That's it.

Q: So that's how the—

LORIS: And George Stevens wanted to top it!

Q: That's how the Assistant Director for Africa found something out about what life in the Congo was really like. Now Charlotte, I want to take you to another post and to another time. I don't know whether that was before or after we had met in the Congo. Namely to Korea, to Seoul.

C. The Pueblo Incident

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I want you to tell me what your role and how you remember the time of the Pueblo incident.

LORIS: I don't think this is something I should really discuss. I was duty officer and I was at home. There was this little activity going on and a telephone call came in to the American Embassy, transferred to me as duty officer. I think it was the United Press in New York City calling. They already knew about the Pueblo. Now, I could make no comment. I just said, I will have someone call you back, I'll be in touch with you." And I would really not care to discuss this in any detail. I think for security reasons and whatever. I had my little role in it and that's it.

D. The News of President Kennedy's Hits Leopoldville

Q: All right, Charlotte. I don't want to take you back, this is probably a different post and a different time again and I don't know where it was. But I think that every one of us of a certain age has exact memories of how, where they were and how they got the news of the assassination of President John Kennedy and what happened afterwards at the post where we were serving. So I would like you to tell me where you were when you got the news and what happened afterwards.

LORIS: I was in my apartment.

Q: Where?

LORIS: In the Congo. I was in Leopoldville having dinner with the Public Affairs Officer's wife. Her husband was back in Washington, as was the Ambassador, Ed Gullion. We were playing Scrabble and believe it or not we had my good old Zenith transoceanic radio turned on and the news came on the Voice of America. I immediately jumped up and—the news was astounding. I got in my Volkswagen—the famous little Volkswagen—and dashed down to the office, which was about 20 minutes away. In the meantime, the flash telegram came in from Washington and I had already announced to the Americans,

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because they were all at the American movie. I went in and turned the movie off and shut it down and said, the President has been assassinated. And we all went to work. And we worked.

Of course the Congolese and the other foreign embassies were all interested because everybody loved John F. Kennedy. So we got all the background material. I typed French bulletins, we pushed out material like 60 because everybody wanted the news. And it went on and on. I worked three days without stopping. Of course the embassy in Brazzaville did not have the set-up that we had so we had to take information over to them, which is why it became a longer project. We would take bulletins over to Brazzaville. Our only communication with Brazzaville was by the ferry boat. In the middle of the third day I said, okay—I think it was McKinney Russell—I said, I'll take the bulletins over. And I had a few lire or whatever the Congolese, francs, in my purse. So the car and the driver take me down and I get on the ferry boat. It's a 20-minute ride across the river and some man from the Brazzaville American embassy met me and collected the papers. He said, don't you want to come up to the embassy? I said, no, I'm very tired, I just want to get on the ferry boat and go back. So he left me, of course. It's the middle of the day, like 12 or 1:00. Well, the ferry boat decided not to go back and there I was. Me and all these Congolese in the heat and no shade. And I had no money to get back up to the embassy. So I just had to wait. I had my return ticket and that was it. So about four hours later the ferry boat decided to operate. I get on it, hand them my little ticket and I go back to Leopoldville, as it was called in those days.

Of course there was no car waiting for me because they didn't know what had happened to me. So I walked up the road to the embassy and sort of collapsed. I said, just get me a car and take me to my apartment. So I went to bed for two days. It was hard work but it was good work, everybody pitched in and it was, you know, one of those things you do. That's it.

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Q: Well, Charlotte, these are the stories that I wanted you to get on the record. Is there anything else that you can remember from any one of your posts that you would still like to have included in this interview?

LORIS: There probably are but I'd like a little more time to think about it before I reveal any more secrets. Thank you.

Q: All right. This is the end of this interview. And if Lew Schmidt and the other people from the oral history project are not satisfied, I would be glad to have the Alumni Association pay my trip out to Santa Barbara and still complete this with Charlotte.

End of interview